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Notes and Comment

We hope, a friend walked in and said, you are planning to make some appropriate comments on the passing of Nelson Eddy and Mischa Auer. Nelson Eddy and Mischa Auer! I'll never forget Eddy singing "Indian Love Call" in "Rose-Marie," and I'll never forget Auer saying "Confidentially, she stinks," describing his dancing pupil in "You Can't Take It With You."

That's very touching, we said, and we have the highest regard for those two gentlemen, too, but if we had to note and comment the deaths of the week, we would probably not get around to Eddy and Auer. These are serious times. Serious people must be noted and commented on. For instance, the same editions that told of the death of Auer, also told of the death of Mohammed Mossadegh, the former Premier of Iran, and the editions that carried the bad news of Mr. Eddy's demise, also announced that Roger Babson, the famous American economist, had left this vale of tears.

Mossadegh? Wasn't he the one in the C.I.A.? our friend asked.

The way we heard it, his opponent, the Shah, who overthrew him, was in the C.I.A., we said, but you never know. Mr. Babson, of course, was the man who predicted the Great Wall Street Crash of 1929.

Meaning no disrespect to Mr. Mossadegh or to Mr. Babson, you understand, our friend said, but it seems to me that Nelson Eddy and Mischa Auer were more important than they. Let me put it another way: in general, entertainers are more important than politicians and economists.

Surely you're joking, we said.

Politicians and economists caused the Great Crash and subsequent Great Depression, he said, and entertainers, particularly Mr. Eddy and Mr. Auer, helped everybody get through it peacefully, and with sanity intact.

They didn't help us get through it, we said. Franklin Roosevelt, a politician, and John Maynard Keynes, an economist, helped us get through it.

Ignoring us, our caller began to rhapsodize. He said: Seeing Nelson Eddy and Jeannette MacDonald in all those 1930's movies, probably the worst art in the history of art, was the purest, sweetest escape I ever knew. Whenever I could spare a dime, it was off to the Rialto or the Bijou, or the Hippodrome, or whatever, to see and hear Eddy as a frontiersman, or cowboy, or Royal Mountie. Immediately, for a couple of hours at least, I forgot the unemployment problem, and all the other problems, thus remaining sane. He sighed. And once I won a set of dishes, to boot.

Well, we conceded, you have a point. We ourselves occasionally imagined we were a handsome red-coated Mountie with a pistol on a boondoggle and a fine baritone back then, and movie-inspired daydreaming did help a little, but as best as we can remember, we never pretended to be Mischa Auer.

Mischa Auer, our caller said levelly, kept America from having a revolution in the 1930's. Before we could protest, he explained: In all the movies back then capitalists were flint-hearted swine. Edward Arnold always played the banker. What powerful propaganda! The people were getting stirred up. Then came "You Can't Take It With You." The rich were the bad guys, again—Edward Arnold, grrr!—but there was a difference. Mischa Auer played an emigre Russian who was reduced to teaching ballet to untalented young ladies. As bad as Edward Arnold was, Auer served to remind us, Joseph Stalin was a lot worse.

And so we forbore revolution and muddled through democratically? we said, finishing his thought for him. We see. Maybe you're right.

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